

ONONDAGA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

2027 EXECUTIVE BUDGET WRITTEN STATEMENT

SECTION 1:

2026 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Onondaga County Parks continued to provide recreation, education, environmental stewardship, and community events throughout Central New York. In 2026, the Parks system advanced major capital projects, facility improvements, innovative programs, and community partnerships.

Building Parks That Are More Accessible, More Inclusive, & More Fun to Explore

In 2026, County Parks:

- Introduced the Explorer Water Bottle Series, encouraging residents to visit 10 County parks while collecting a unique sticker at each destination.
- Expanded adaptive recreation through Health Department partnerships, including all-terrain track wheelchairs at Beaver Lake, beach wheelchairs at Oneida Shores and Jamesville Beach, and an accessible shuttle for Beaver Lake's Nature on Wheels program.
- Tested ultrasonic buoy technology at Jamesville Beach to reduce harmful blue-green algae and increase available swimming days.
- Continued environmental education and camps at Beaver Lake Nature Center and the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, and partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension for four weeks of 4-H Summer Camps at four County parks.
- Provided year-round recreation through beaches, campgrounds, winter activities, paddling, fishing, educational programs, and community events including Forest to Flapjacks and Wishes for Fishes.
- Stocked nearly 60,000 trout through Carpenter's Brook Fish Hatchery.
- The 2025–2026 Lights on the Lake season welcomed 36,931 vehicles, generated \$10,767 for local charities, and collected 2,346 pounds of food for Feed Our Vets.

Investing in the Future of Our Parks (In 2026, County Parks):

- Completed the \$6 million, 230,000-square-foot Hopkins Road Park multi-sport synthetic turf Super Field, expanding opportunities for baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse, and football and enabling regional tournaments.
- Completed a \$13.7 million renovation and expansion of the Onondaga Lake Park Marina, including docks, parking, fueling, utilities, pump-out facilities, dredging, and a new comfort station, along with required environmental remediation.
- Completed a comprehensive Rosamond Gifford Zoo facility assessment to guide future investments. Planning and renovations are underway for the snow leopard exhibit, tiger pools, and African Savanna, while the Zoo evaluates an additional elephant building. The Zoo also welcomed the elephant shrew, one of only six North American zoos to house the species.
- Advanced planning for the Onondaga County Veterans Cemetery Master Plan update, including burial capacity, roadway circulation, drainage, and stormwater management.
- Advanced design of the new Oneida Shores beach and campground facility and connected the RV pump-out station to existing sewer line.

2026 BUDGET REVIEW

The Parks Department will finish 2026 within budget.

SECTION 2:

2027 BUDGET OVERVIEW

The 2027 budget includes standard salary and wage increases consistent with the baseline budgeting approach, as well as increases in supplies & materials, maintenance, utilities & rents and all other due to inflation and contract escalators.

The Parks Department's 2027 Professional Services appropriation decreases by \$103,811, primarily due to the hiring of a full-time veterinarian, which reduces reliance on contracted veterinary services. The account continues to support essential services including drug and alcohol testing, laboratory testing, farrier services, specialized and emergency veterinary diagnostic and medical services, water testing, security, and website maintenance.

The Parks Department's 2027 Travel and Training appropriation increases by \$6,250, primarily to support additional required safety training. The account also supports employee mileage and professional development, including parks and recreation conferences, pesticide applicator licensing, first aid and CPR, equipment and operator certifications, playground safety, animal care and transport, zoo animal care, and summer camp best practices. These trainings help ensure employees maintain necessary certifications and safely and effectively perform their responsibilities.

The Automotive Equipment appropriation continues to support the Parks Department's ongoing vehicle replacement plan, helping ensure a safe and reliable fleet for departmental operations. Specific vehicle replacement information is provided in the Executive Vehicle Summary.

Parks revenues reflect several adjustments based on recent collections and contractual agreements. County Services revenue decreases based on historical revenue generated from admissions and shelter rentals, while Commissions revenue increases as a result of a new revenue-sharing agreement with the Friends of the Zoo. Sales of Property primarily reflects revenue from fuel sales to other municipalities, as well as firewood and ice sales at County parks.

SECTION 3:

2027 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Continue to Invest in and Maintain Our Parks

- Prioritize maintenance, service contracts, infrastructure, and capital improvements to keep facilities safe and functional. Continue strategic investments that extend facility life, improve the visitor experience, and protect County parkland through proactive property surveys and clearly established boundaries.

Expand Access and Inclusion

- Expand adaptive recreation and accessibility for visitors of all ages and abilities, including the expansion and renovation of the Boundless Playground at Onondaga Lake Park.

Operate Efficiently and Build Strong Partnerships

- Continue resource sharing, collaboration, and efficiency efforts while strengthening partnerships with County departments, municipalities, nonprofits, schools, and community organizations.

Protect Our Natural Resources and Connect People to Nature

- Strengthen conservation, environmental education, responsible recreation, and innovative approaches to protecting the County's natural resources.

Create More Reasons to Visit Our Parks

- Expand programs, events, recreation, and unique experiences that encourage year-round visitation and introduce new audiences to the Parks system.